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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the rapid influx of information technology into society requires a change in university administration from the current political system to a computer based management system for higher productivity. The paper describes the dysfunctional nature of the political system of management in its lack of full accountability. The bureaucratic mechanism of a political system is described as a "decision making-authority structure" which functions as a formal communication and control mechanism on the assumption that management is sovereign over the operation of the organization. Within this system, self-oriented administrators usually employ authoritative leadership styles with a shift from productivity to the maintenance of the status quo in the dominance orders of the organization. The paper goes on to argue that these patterns create pressure to squeeze work out of faculty and put academicians into a position of compromising long term productivity for short-term gains in salary and rank. The paper also notes that the lack of quantitative criteria for measuring the quality of personnel performance permits self-oriented superiors to use "mushroom management" to mask administrative malpractice. Finally the paper argues that these political systems ultimately produce declining academic performance. Fourteen references are included. (JB)

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THE DYSFUNCTIONAL NATURE OF POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

The paradigm shift being produced by the rapid influx of information technology into society is necessitating that a metamorphosis take place in university adminsitration. This structural change must replace political systems, which govern collegiate organizations, with computer based-management systems to facilitate these institutions to achieve a zenith of productivity.

THE DYSFUNCTIONAL NATURE OF POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION

The world is beset with rapid, accelerating change that is making it increasingly clear that many of the "decision making-authority structures" which dominate university administration are dysfunctional. These antiquated authority structures, which are referred to as political systems in this treatise, have been operating in organizations since time immemorial. The political system provided an adequate bureaucratic construct in the agricultural and industrial ages before the computer made it possible to pursue "truth" in a wide array of disciplines with high fidelity. It should now be clear to astute observers that the political system is an ineffective construct in facilitating universities to adapt to the needs of society in the information age. This high output era will be characterized by a computer-based learning environment in which creative, innovative labor forces must show strong "problem solving" proficiencies in science, math, and technology to advance productivity in post industrial nations.

It is contended in this paper that placing greater stress on collegiate organizations, governed by political systems, to meet the needs of an information based society will result in the rapid collapse of academic productivity. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to describe the dysfunctional nature of the political system and elucidate the consequences of perpetuating this antiquated construct in university administration. The alternative to the political system is the computer based-management system which must be discussed in another paper because of space constraints.

Political Systems Lack Full Accountability

Although political systems provide for the delegation of authority and responsibility, they usually dysfunction by failing to require all personnel

be held strictly accountable for the quality of their performance. The impact of this discrepancy on university output will be explored below by defining these antiquated authority structures, describing their faulty operation and then discussing how they undermine academic productivity.

Defining the Bureaucratic Mechanism

The political system is a "decision making-authority structure" which functions as a formal communication and control mechanism on the assumption that management is sovereign over the operation of the organization. The paradigm for this authority structure implies that management (administration) is the "measure of all things." This assumption has no doubt been perpetuated in sympathy with French philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau's fallacious idea that man is naturally good and able to perfect himself. The adoption of this man-centered paradigm encourages administrators to feign infallibility which relegates subordinates to a position of inferiority based on their inherent imperfection and frailty. Such a stance establishes an adversarial relationship between superiors and subordinates undermining the potential value these academicians can add to their university through cooperation, group learning and collaboration.

The absence of accountability in the political system of a university creates slack that lets an organization cater to the personalities of the power elite who control its operation. These personalities can be dichotomized into "service oriented" and "self oriented" academicians. Service oriented employees are usually individuals who have strong character which motivates them to build self respect by making significant contributions to their university. Self oriented personnel are likely to possess weak character which prompts them to require subordinates to serve their needs for self aggrandizement.

Self absorbed administrators display an irrepressible drive to achieve the power of position over others and the trappings of success, e.g., salary, prestige, privilege, etc., which communicates their status in the pecking order. These "takers" have usually not achieved exceptional performance in their careers. This is because they frequently lack the strength of character to internalize the great psychological pressure necessary for extraordinary accomplishments. Self-serving academicians, who have never achieved standards of excellence in their own vocational performance, will often seek to disguise their feelings of inadequacy by taking a position of power over peers. This way they can experience the pseudo self-esteem and feelings of security that are provided by the power, in formal authority, to control the behavior of subordinates. When superiors possess weak character traits it can be anticipated that they will show a penchant for using Machiavellian tactics, e.g., deceit, duplicity, craftiness, etc., to advance their own selfish ends to the detriment of university constituents. Self-serving administrators are seldom embarrassed by the use of chicanery to promote themselves at the expense of others. But they cannot stand for the "light of day" to be focused on their parasitic activity. This condition initiates frenzied efforts on their part to repress individuals who criticize their self-serving actions outside the fold. Clearly this type of academician can have a devastating impact on their university when they get into top positions in the organizational hierarchy and encourage like kind to follow them into administration. Self-serving academicians in top university positions have difficulty attracting service oriented personnel into the administrative hierarchy because their opposing value systems do not mesh.

Self-Oriented Authority Structure

Self-oriented administrators, operating within the context of a political system, usually employ authoritative leadership styles. This means they can be expected to use autocratic rule to sever the link between authority and accountability in their positions. Once accountability is eliminated in administration the objective of the political system shifts from productivity to the maintenance of the status quo in the dominance orders of the organization.

Whenever the relationship between authority and accountability is severed, it is a simple matter for opportunists with credentials but not the aptitude for administration to get into hierarchical jobs. Political educators who lack the competence and integrity for administration can gravitate to positions of authority through cronyism. Job qualifications can be used in the bureaucracy of a university that simply requires an understanding of the bureaucratic rules and regulations for the position, the capacity to process reams of mind-numbing clerical work, and a willingness to "go along with administrative malpractice in order to get along." When the above mismanagement permits high levels of incompetence to be inculcated into administration it turns bureaucrats into anachronisms if not liabilities. This creates a situation where the defective manage the effective in universities.

The above conditions allow self-serving administrators to promote the illusion that they have God-like virtue. This misnomer lets them see their job as basically giving subordinates orders, rewarding success and punishing mistakes and failures. These "drivers" get work done by introducing Social Darwinism into their units in the form of "free competition" for merit raises. Faculty are rewarded for "the best effort" under the normal curve syndrome

irrespective of their personal circumstances. This rivalry can be "hyped" further with opportunities for rapid promotion through the ranks. Unfortunately, unscrupulous superiors will rig the outcome of these contests in favor of sycophants, lackeys and cronies by giving them preferential treatment with reward-laden work assignments. Hence, these conditions combine to make the competitive environment very "cut throat" under the tutelage of self-serving superiors who want results no matter what the cost to subordinates.

Human Capital Depreciation

The use of the above hierarchical pressure to squeeze work out of faculty frequently puts these academicians into a race between job obsolescence and retirement. This is the result of encouraging academicians to sell out their long-term productivity for short-term gains in salary and rank. The problem is made acute by the feudal order of the political system which does not usually prescribe for the use of effective counseling, training, and educational programs to advance the knowledge, skills and attitudes of faculty over their careers. The subsequent "meat grinder effect" depreciates academicians as human capital which is clearly exemplified in the problem of wage compaction for faculty in their late forties and beyond. This administrative malpractice can place conscientious faculty under debilitating stress that all too often undermines their family life, health, productivity, and career potential.

Self-oriented administrators are able to get away with this abuse of power by replacing leadership and managerial skills, required by their positions, with patronage and coercive practices. The use of the carrot and stick are expedient means of control that are well suited to administrators who like to react without deliberation over problems. This means that

educational politicians in administration can line their pockets (e.g., promoting salaries based on status instead of productivity, remunerative deals with subordinates, PERKS, etc.) by using institutional resources to reward their friends (cronies, sycophants, lackeys) and punish their enemies (whistle blowers who challenge their administrative malpractice). Self-oriented administrators can reward or punish subordinates at their discretion when they do not disseminate job descriptions, publish measurable criteria for evaluation purposes, or make an honest effort to provide all personnel in the same classification with relatively equal work loads and opportunities for recompense. When the above mismanagement goes unchecked it is possible for superiors to use domination, intimidation, and manipulation to establish a pecking order that keeps most subordinates in line through the fear of punishment.

Mushroom Management

The bureaucracy of a university is usually void of quantitative criteria which can be used to objectively measure the quality of personnel performance. This circumstance permits self-oriented superiors to use "mushroom management" to camouflage administrative malpractice. Such a ploy provides for administrators to preserve their power by using secrecy to keep everyone in the dark as to what they know and how they are carrying out their jobs. These superiors can then use the "smoke and mirrors" of gamesmanship to pile the manure on their constituents with deceit, misinformation, and rhetoric in promoting the illusion their "zero defect" bureaucracy is working. A major discrepancy, which can be exploited through mushroom management to create the perception administrators are producing satisfactory results, concerns the variable state of veracity in a bureaucracy. This condition results from the penchant of determining "truth" in a political system by a majority vote.

Such a situation permits decisions to be rooted in the sliding scale (moral, amoral, immoral dimensions) of situation ethics. This practice allows the power elite to stay in the comfort zone by compromising moral, legal and/or operational standards. Continued circumvention of moral absolutes in favor of situation ethics reinforces self-serving cliches, e.g., "The ends justify the means," "To the victor belongs the spoils," "Might determines right," etc., which ultimately makes the "law of the jungle" the standard for determining right and wrong.

Some academicians are offended when the lid is removed from the political system to expose the waste, inefficiency, mismanagement, and sometimes fraud that results from administrative malpractice. These employees want euphemisms, e.g., misguided, inefficient, short sighted, etc., used to mask the untrustworthy behavior of superiors who single mindedly pursue their own self-interests in a university. Many academicians who are witnesses to this deceitful behavior simply look out for number one by adopting the three monkey "modus operandi" whereby they see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil. Slavish adherence to this political creed raises the probability that knowledge without character will be the bane of society in the information age. Camouflaging the self-oriented behavior of administrators in an ocean of deceit will not mitigate the disastrous effects of operating a collegiate organization on a foundation of situation ethics. The gravity of this claim can be demonstrated with the following anecdote. It has been suggested that a frog can be boiled to death by placing it in a pan of water and slowly turning up the heat. If the water temperature is increased in perceptively small increments, the frog will not jump out of the pan. By the same token, when a university is governed by a political system, it can be expected that self-serving administrators will attempt to perpetuate the perception of

infallibility by rooting their decisions in situation ethics. Self-absorbed superiors will likely try to obscure their mistakes from public view by turning up unethical, but not necessarily illegal, decisions to destructive levels. Productivity can be boiled out of a university operating amidst chronic change, as unethical decisions are increased in rapid, but imperceptible increments over a short period of time. This loss of productivity will likely be manifested as universities experience unrelenting pressure to adapt to the high output milieu of the information age. Some of the ethical problems contributing to the dire consequences of continuing to govern collegiate organizations with political systems are described below.

Low Productive Potential of Construct

The dysfunctions produced by political systems in carrying out teaching, research, service and administrative functions in universities are becoming increasingly evident. For example, few if any universities governed by political systems, have introduced sound procedures for measuring teaching effectiveness. This situation, combined with students' growing obsession with high grades to improve educational and/or employment opportunities, is compromising the integrity of the classroom. Faculty have found that student instructional surveys (SIRS) are being used as a surrogate measure of teaching effectiveness because they are convenient and easy to administer. In addition, these surveys have a quantitative element which can be used to stratify teachers. The above circumstances are encouraging teachers to "hype" their proficiency scores by using stratagems, e.g., dumbing down tests, vocabulary and texts, curving exam grades, and using idiosyncratic instructional behavior to indicate to students exactly what will be on quizzes. Some instructors may flag probable test questions by raising their voices and repeating the information or saying, "Listen up, you might see this

again" or tell students that whenever they tap the lectern the pupils will know they are going to see that information on the exam. Students are taught to regurgitate but not think--to analyze, deduce, understand consequences and make long-range decisions. These schemes can produce relatively high grades, with minimum effort, which can create the perception of good teaching when instructional performance is measured by surveys grounded in gratuitous student opinions. This discrepancy in teacher evaluations is contributing to making America a "nation at risk" as students in Asian and European countries continue to outperform domestic pupils in the acquisition of knowledge.

It is possible for self-oriented administrators to reward patronage, instead of productivity, when political systems are void of measurable criteria for assessing the value of research and publication. Highly variable merit rewards can be allocated to faculty for research and publication when objective performance standards are not used as a check and balance to human frailties, e.g., leniency or harshness, halo or recency effects, central tendency, organizational uses influence, and interpersonal bias, in the evaluation process. These conditions undermine a university's productivity in creating, organizing, and disseminating knowledge in society.

Also, self-serving administrators can use bureaucracy to avoid implementing sound personnel practices. This mismanagement allows them to give sycophants, cronies, and lackeys considerable preferential treatment in service assignments. Some of these cohorts receive so much favor in the form of "reward-laden" service assignments that they are virtually guaranteed merit raises before the evaluation period begins. Faculty who refuse to patronize self-absorbed superiors are assigned to mundane service duties which further undermines the potential value the university could add to the economy.

When cronyism is used to put academicians into administration who have credentials but not the aptitude for these positions, it represents a major opportunity loss to a university. These unfit administrators are usually given life time appointments in the absence of accountability. They learn to survive in bureaucracy by functioning as educational politicians. This means they will promote their own selfish ends by using university resources to reward sycophants, lackeys, and cronies for their loyalty and punish academicians who challenge their abuse of power. The waste, inefficiency, mismanagement, and sometimes fraud that is produced by administrative malpractice in the university bureaucracy undermines the potential value these hierarchical positions could add to the institution.

Thus, the problem of declining academic performance can be traced to the use of political systems to govern the operations of universities. These dysfunctional authority structures introduce a culture of deceit into universities based on the misnomer "perception is reality." The illusion that bureaucracy is working in academic institutions can be created when political systems provide for decisions to be rooted in situation ethics. Universities that operate on a foundation of situation ethics are vulnerable to a collapse of productivity when they experience increasing stress from rapid, accelerating change in the information age. Clearly a metamorphosis must take place in university administration to replace political systems with computer-based management systems. These cybernetic authority structures, which are evolving in third wave organizations, will facilitate universities to achieve a zenith of productivity in the information age.

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